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Communication process in a mobile phone company

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Abstract

The paper analyzes a company acting on the extremely dynamic market of mobile telephony, a dynamism that determines specific strategies and communication patterns within the firm. The analysis is performed using an integrated model of communication and change; model designed by the authors and published through previously developed works. The authors draw conclusions regarding the characteristics and effectiveness of communication inside this company and outside it, but also about the utility of the used model as a tool for company management and for an increased employee competence regarding their communication with the client.

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1. Literature review

Customer satisfaction favors the company, ensuring the loyalty of existing customers and attracting new ones. Hiebeler et al, 1998. One unhappy customer discourages, on average, another 50 potential customers Johns, 1997.

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There are some clear rules under which the firm must have an attitude of “customer assistance” in case of complaints. That is to carefully listen the customer, to find out precisely what is its discontent and to find the best way to “compensate” it, materially or morally, Rees, 1996. Sometimes an “assisted” customer can be turned into a loyal one in cases when the company was wrong, because of the way that company acted to repair its fault, Prutianu, 2000b.

Also, customer complaints can act as an external audit, necessary to assess the “health” of firm, financially and organizationally. Customer complaints provide an objective opinion on the company’s situation, they indicate the direction the company should follow and how it can reach its goals, Clarke, 2002.

Finally, the prerequisites for improving the situation are, inter alia, competence of personnel in this regard, understanding the importance of permanent relationships with clients and continuous learning from previous mistakes, Câmpeanu-Sonea & Sonea, 2005, but also the constant adaptation to the market, not only in terms of products’ diversity and quality, but also as the attitude towards client is concerned, Câmpeanu-Sonea & Sonea, 2011.

2. Brief presentation of the model used for analysis

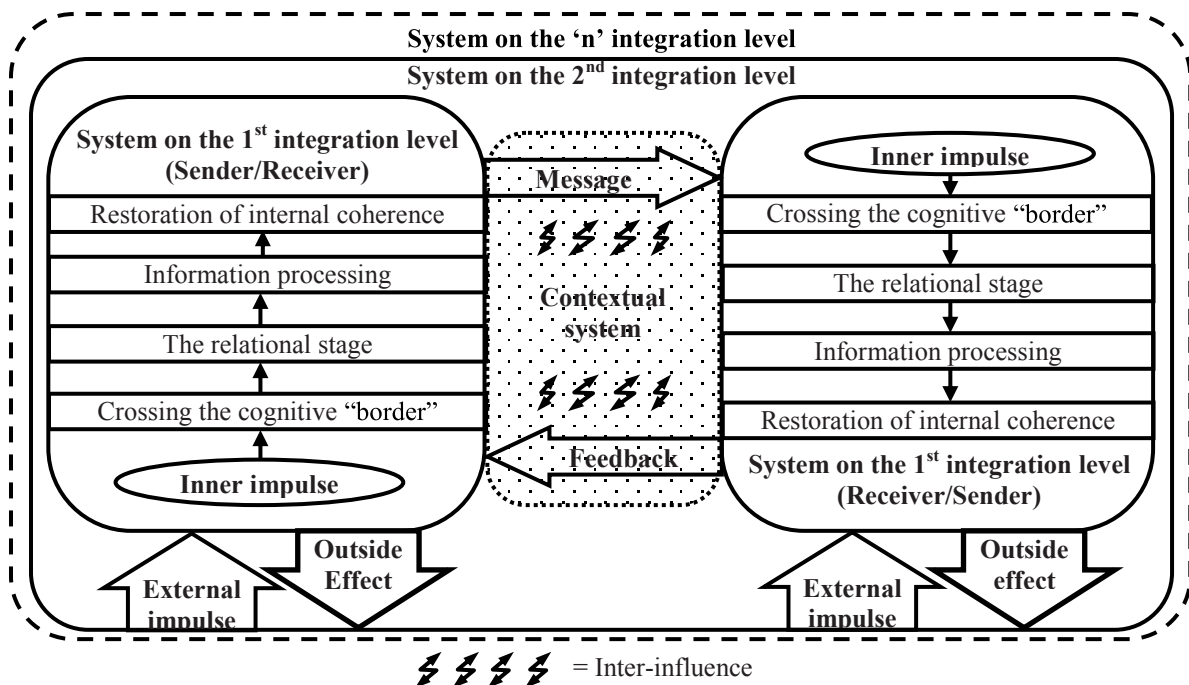


Fig. 1. The communication-change integrated model

The first author developed and explained in detail this model, Sonea, 2011, using some basic ideas:

- In order to describe the actual communication between two people or two groups, we need to overcome the simplistic, cybernetic vision of communication, thus accepting that each party involved in communication is more than a transmitter or a receiver, but a **cognitive system**, which gives rise to complex cognitive interactions during communication.

- Communication always involves a change in the cognitive systems of communication actors, and in order to understand the change we divided this process into stages following existing models with a high value of generality, which were integrated into a single **model in four steps**.
- The **super ordinate system** of the communication actors' is also involved in communication. The complex cognitive systems of the actors do not fully participate in the process of communication, limited in time and space, but each such cognitive system develops a **cognitive subsystem** that is actually involved in this process of communication.
- Thus was created an **integrated communication-change model**, outlined in Fig 1, which we consider to be applicable to any process of communication or change.

The authors have written about using a model as in Fig 1 in order to control the communication process for managing a firm. As the name says, the model facilitates the understanding of some aspects regarding the relations between groups and employees, for a permanent change in improving the communication, the organizational culture and the results of company's operations, Câmpeanu, Sonea & Sonea, 2011.

3. The case of firm Mobile, analyzed through the stages of the integrated model of communication and change

The person that narrated the case is a woman of 65 with a high education. From 2004, she uses a simple mobile phone, but of a very good quality, and she is subscribed to a company which is called Mobile in this case study.

3.1. Monday, June 11, 2012

An employee of Mobile called the customer to congratulate her for loyalty and told her that Mobile had a present for her, a new and highly performant telephone, fixed but wireless. For this device, the client can sign a contract for two years and pay a monthly fee of 25 RON. This conversation took place around 6:00 PM, after the client was back from work, tired and hungry, and she accepted everything that the employee proposed her. After maximum three days, a commissioner would bring the device to the client and sign a contract.

Conforming to the communication-change integrated model, the above discussion represents the first phase of the process, **crossing the cognitive "border"**, when parties try to attract one another's attention. Obviously, the greetings and the gifted device were manipulative tricks aiming exactly **to cross this cognitive "border"** of the client. Also, the element of surprise was used in order to take advantage of a situation when the client lacked the energy to express and support her own interests. Using the terms from the above model, the client was then less able to control her own **cognitive subsystem** created as a result of communication.

3.2. Tuesday, June 12, 2012

The next day, the client has reviewed the discussion and, subsequently, **the cognitive subsystem** she created because of the discussion. Before signing the contract she wanted to know in which terms she could talk internationally with the new telephone. Also, the client found out that she was going to be very busy for the next days and wanted to reschedule signing the contract with Mobile. Thus it started the second phase of our model, **the relational phase**, in which parties usually try to relate and to harmonize their interests.

The client immediately called the number from she was called the night before. But nobody answered at that number for four or five calls, and when she finally received an answer it was a robot guiding her to a free number of the company, which was answered by another robot. Thus, the client could not establish a dialogue by phone with company Mobile's employees. The client decided that in her limited free time she would

personally get to a company's agency. There, she found out that in order to speak her only choice was to take a waiting number and wait till someone listened to her.

At pay desks, employees were available only for cash payments. Other employees were busy with two types of issues, for which were given two types of waiting numbers: for purchasing equipment or accessories there were the A numbers, for which the waiting was shorter, and the B numbers, for suggestions and complaints.

The client could have chosen a number from A category, because she had a contract offer, but she was so upset that she could not even announce that she was not going to be home at commissioner's arrival, that she decided to make a complaint so she took a number from B category, especially since then she did not know that implicitly she opted to wait more, that was exactly one hour.

When, at least, she could talk to the company's representative for the "B numbers", he told the client that the robot which replied her in the morning could be replaced by a human operator who takes customers' messages. The contacted operator said she would forward on that the client can receive new device only the next week, but it seems either that the message was not transmitted, or no account was taken of it.

Abstractly analyzing what we described, communication stages do not follow linearly, but when steps take longer, they may include shorter communication cycles. So, although **the cognitive barrier** is a characteristic of the first stage of communication process, it appeared in this second stage, when an included communication cycle took place, between the representative for "B numbers" and the operator he contacted. The cognitive barrier was represented by ignoring the client's message.

3.3. Thursday, June 14, 2012

The client was busy with a kind of work that demanded silence and the phone ring was disturbing her, but just then Mobile company repeatedly called her, assuming the initiative in an abusive manner. When she finally answered, the firm's commissioner, very angry, rebuked the client for not being at home. When the client replied that she announced long ago that she cannot receive him, he answered in quite a harsh tone that he would not discuss with the client furthermore, because that was not his problem.

The company has called her again, several times, while the client was still not able to communicate by phone. When the client was finally able to answer, an employee from the company headquarters in Bucharest reproved her for not being at home, telling that the company had already activated the card for the two-year contract. Therefore, that employee sent the manipulative message that the client was already too involved and she could not avoid signing the contract. Thus, the client was punished for taking an initiative in the relation and for not according the uttermost importance to the Mobile's device. At this point of discussion, the company's representatives did not discuss in polite terms referring to loyalty and congratulations, and did not even accept Mobile's responsibility for ignoring the message that the client had sent through their operator.

All those unsuccessful efforts in which both parties tried to contact one another formed the second phase in our model, **the relational stage**, when the nature of relation between parties is revealed. In our case study, this relation is characterized by Mobile's refuse to relate the wills of both parties, but instead this firm tried to hold the initiative and control, to impose its **message**, while ignoring the **feedback** of the client.

The client said she was unhappy with the way the company dealt with customers and asked that, if they were treating her like that when they needed her to accept an offer, what was going to be when she would need assistance or troubleshooting. The Mobile employee answered, in a rather harsh and arrogant way, that "a multinational company as theirs cannot proceed otherwise". Abstractly analyzing this no diplomatic yet spontaneous answer, the employee from Bucharest revealed the dependence of her cognitive system to its **supraordinate system**, Mobile company. Therefore, she regarded Mobile not just as group of people who could have been wrong, but as higher entity in itself, a superordinate authority that was hierarchically superior to employees and clients, who were in her mind just ordinary people who had to obey to Mobile. At that time moment started the third stage of communication/change process, a stage called **information processing**.

Normally, this very important stage should include a dialogue with the other party involved in communication, in order to solve the matters, but as we understand the dialogue was deficient. The reason is that information processing is largely determined by how various data are ranked, and if one party considers itself on a superior position, mobile company representative, in our case; information is processed virtually ignoring the position of the other actor of communication/change.

The basis of communication is the personality, **cognitive system**, of each person involved, and the employee's personality was overshadowed by the company's strong image. Using the terms from Figure 1, the **external impulse** coming from the company overshadowed her own **inner impulse** that could have led her to a normal human communication and it could have made her take the client as a human being with free will, not just an entity subordinate to Mobile.

The client told that she will not sign anymore the contract with Mobile, and the irritated employee concluded the discussion.

3.4. Monday, June 25, 2012

As client's mobile phone subscription to Mobile was expiring in the near future. Another employee from Mobile called her to suggest a more favorable subscription for the client, for whom they concluded a one year contract. That was the fourth stage, the end of the process, **restoration of internal coherence**, when both sides could have been able to stabilize the consequences of change and to become stronger because of them. But, because of their poor ability to dialogue, Mobile staff was not able to sell the new device so they ended the process of communication/change not only selling nothing, but receiving less money from the client for the same services.

Because Mobile employees did not listen to the client, they have fallen into their own trap. This effect is called "groupthink" and it occurs when group members are convinced of their point of view and obstinately want to preserve ways of thinking and action already rooted, ignoring internal and external stimuli that might cause a change in the organization.

We know what the company should learn from the episode that occurred. The client had to contact, directly or indirectly, six employees from Mobile: the one that originally proposed her the contract, the representative from the "B numbers", the operator contacted by phone, the commissioner that told the client that she wasn't found at home, the employee from Bucharest that scolded her because she was not home and, finally, the employee with whom the customer has signed a one-year contract. The result was an undue waste of time and effort for the client and a mediocre contract for the firm.

4. Conclusions regarding the communication at Mobile

The keyword for Mobile' way of communicating is *imposing*. Mobile staff insisted to the extreme on the first stage of communication, they tried to impose them self in order to **cross the cognitive "border"** of the client, sacrificing the other stages, and they did it through manipulation:

- **Face-to-face persuasion:** because the client could not contact Mobile employees by phone, she had to go to a Mobile agency on "foreign territory" and be exposed to direct interpersonal influence of employees trained to persuade and solve conflicts in their favor. Also, by waiting in the line among many others in order to meet the "one and only" employee, the report of power changes to favor the employee who, moreover, usually has a professional desk and attitude, impressing the client through an aura of authority for the "Law of Authority", see Medicina, 2006a.
- **Time pressure** Prutianu, 2000b: the client is called by phone to be offered something and immediately she is requested to answer. Thus avoids that the client can effectively process information in her cognitive subsystem.

- **Emotional manipulation**, Medicina, 2006b: the client is faced with flattery, congratulations and “gifts”, which are intended to maintain the relationship in the emotional area and thus prevent the client to think, that is to process information in a realistic and critical way.
- **Psychological pressure**: calling insistently till someone answers, a technique used by more Mobile employees. This pressure is considered normal by the company and, moreover, the operator warned the client: “Even if you do not answer, we still call you, until we find you.” That was even after the client said she wanted no calls till a specific day and even after this client said she did not want to sign the contract. This technique is less subtle, but it still works by undermining the psychical resistance of the client, see Prutianu, 2000b, for a description of a similar technique based on repetition that cracks down on the victim’s psychical resistance.

But imposing is the opposite of cooperation, and Mobile has not only a problem in the relation with a client, but it has also a problem with the **relations between employees**, so the information from the client was lost somewhere inside the firm. Mobile should consider the clients as individual entities that have to be treated differently, for example designating an employee that has to meet the needs of a certain client while negotiating a contract and till it is signed.

However, Mobile has no shortage of customers, and the reason may originate in the **supraordinate system** of the highest level, which is the society. At society level, there is the fashion of cell phones and an enthusiastic adoption of the products incorporating the cutting edge technology. The super ordinate system imposes a trend and Mobile takes advantage of that, promoting its products. It seems that, for the young generation, technology is not a mean, but a goal in itself, a kind of “religion” that replaces the wonderful world of God with the wondrous digital world. Apparently, nowadays people switched from the fascination of the divine super ordinate system to the fascination of the technological super ordinate system.

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